

RPG Reload File 022 – 'RPG Quest – Minimae'

[January 22, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we wander the world looking for shiny jewelry to pick up. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past to see how it's doing in the dystopian future of the present. It's a chance to revisit some golden oldies to see how well they've been maintained and if they're still as fun as we remember them to be. Sometimes, it's an excuse for me to write a lot of words that wouldn't really fit in a normal review. I try to get a nice balanced plate of RPGs in my schedule, and you fine people can help me out with that by voting for a reader's choice **Reload** once per month. You can easily cast your vote by commenting below, posting in the [Official RPG Reload Club](#) thread, or tweeting me at [@RPGReload](#). The winner is randomly selected, so anyone has a chance to win. What fun!

I'm not going to lie, next week's **Reload** is a bit of a doozy, so for this week, I wanted something a little on the lighter side. When that's what you're craving, nothing says zero calories quite like *RPG Quest – Minimae* ([\\$1.99](#)). Yes, I'm spelling it without the funny latin character 'æ'. Japanese keyboards are hard enough to deal with as it is. Anyway, *Minimae* is a minimalist RPG adventure from indie developer P1XL, a small team that makes a lot of great retro throwbacks. The game first released on iOS in November of 2009, those glorious days when the iPhone 3GS was the hottest piece of kit around and Lady Gaga had just unleashed "Bad Romance". As long ago as that seems, *Minimae* is actually even older than that.





Like many of P1XL's games, *Minimae* began life as a Commodore 64 game. It was created in 2001 for the 2001 MiniGame Competition, an event where it took first prize in the C64 2K (that's memory size, not the year) category. Its original title was *Minima*, a portmanteau of 'Mini' and '*Ultima*', and the game was fairly close to the version we know and love today. It was then expanded into *Minima Reloaded* in 2003, this time winning the C64 4K category at the 2003 MiniGame Competition. This version added towns, had better graphics, and featured a more varied soundtrack. The next year, while one of the developers was working on the C64 Direct-To-TV, one of those plug and play joysticks loaded with games that were popular about a decade back, he slipped *Minima Reloaded* in as an Easter Egg, mapping the game's functions to joystick controls for the first time. Its last step before making it over to iOS was a 2006 update to add keyboard controls back in and fix a couple of other issues.

Clearly, it's a game near and dear to the heart of its creator, Robin Harbron, so it's perhaps little surprise that when Habron and P1XL co-founder Sam Washburn formed P1XL Games, they made it their debut title on iOS. The iOS version swapped the Commodore aesthetics in favor of a NES-style presentation. The reasoning behind this was simply because Washburn, who did the graphics and sound, was more comfortable working in that style. The chiptune music is great, and has a bit of an 8-bit Capcom sound to it. The new graphics, combined with the tile-based nature of the game and its fantasy theme, rather serendipitously call to mind *Dragon Quest's* [\(\\$2.99\)](#) look, something I've no doubt helped *Minimae* along in the pre-*Dragon Quest* days of the App Store. It's a bit more colorful and has more detail than I remember the NES being capable of, but the style is unmistakable.

As you'd expect from a game that originally fit into two whole kilobytes, *Minimae* is a pretty simple game. You play as a knight who has been tasked by his king to recover the eight magic rings scattered across the land. It's very basic, but as you recover each ring, you'll get a small bit of story that adds a little texture to the quest. Only a little bit, mind you, so don't come in here looking for even a *Dragon Quest 1*-sized narrative. With your quest in hand, you set off to find the rings, each of which is hidden in a cave somewhere around the world map. It's a scavenger hunt more than anything else, but the map is large enough that it takes a while to get your bearings, let alone find eight little cave tiles. The clues to finding the caves are in the towns that you'll find around the world. The NPCs you find will give you hints, and each town also has a well that you can throw coins into to find out if any rings are nearby, and if so, which direction they lie in. Towns also offer inns where you can rest to regain HP, blacksmiths where you can get new weapons, and a mysterious woman who will sell you map crystals.

It's important to have some idea of where you're going, because wandering the countryside is pretty dangerous. True to the games it pays homage to, there are frequent random battles as you travel from place to place. As long as you're upgrading your weapon diligently, each individual monster poses

little threat, but death from a thousand paper cuts is a very real possibility. Enemies will often take at least a little piece out of you, and even running away costs you HP. Attacking and running are your only options in battle, and whether or not you strike the enemy seems more heavily influenced by luck than in most RPGs. It's a bit like the *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks in that if you miss, the enemy hits. If you're using an outdated weapon, you'll have even more misses, of course, but even with the best weapon you can buy, you'll still occasionally have battles where the monster takes a lot more out of you than you would have guessed.

These little slices of damage can add up while you're out wandering around, and the only way to heal up to is stay at an inn. *Minimae* keeps to its minimal design by having only two items to speak of, and one of them doesn't make its appearance until nearly the end of the quest. The map orbs allow you to take a bird's-eye view of the map and are essential for avoiding getting lost. The amulet allows you to teleport back to the home castle as many times as you want. In the main quest, the castle is in a central location, so while it seems like a little favor, it actually helps a lot with the post-game content. What you won't find in that brief list is any sort of healing item at all. With that fact in mind, and the way the outcome of battles can vary so wildly, you need to be really careful with how far you push your exploration. If you run out of HP, you'll be sent back to the last town you visited, with everything you had accomplished since wiped out, so don't forget to plan for the return trip.

Character progression in *Minimae* is interesting. It's set up to keep a good balance the whole way through the game, and it's quite effective at that. Unlike most RPGs, you don't gain experience from battles in this game. You do gain gold, but financial rewards aside, you have nothing to gain from slugging it out in random battles. Instead, your character can improve by two different means. Finding a ring will raise your maximum HP, though it does have the side effect of unleashing whatever tough monster you just killed into the regular overworld random encounter rotation. The other way you can

make your character stronger is by purchasing a new weapon. New weapons usually unlock with each new ring you find, though at a certain point, there won't be anything better available. Upgrading your weapon is the main purpose for the gold you collect, since inns and orbs cost very little. Each new weapon grants you increased accuracy, leading to potential double-hits and fewer misses. You'll need to keep your weapon up to date if you want to survive against the stronger enemies that appear as you grab each ring, a process that sometimes might require a little grinding.

In all, there are eight rings to collect, and not many more enemy types than that. Each ring is guarded by the enemy type one tier up from the strongest possible random battle. As mentioned, after beating them, they can start to appear in the wild, making the trek back a little tricky in some cases. After beating a boss and recovering a ring, you'll receive a short bit of flavor text that points at some sinister purposes behind your quest. When you're about to take the last ring, the game prompts you to make sure you really want to do it. The choice is up to you, but it's ultimately something of a "but thou must!" decision. After returning with the rings, a few side quests open up. One of them provides a sink for the gold you've likely been accumulating since getting the last weapon, while the other has you taking a couple more trips around the different towns looking for information. This particular quest is supposed to act as a bridge for a sequel. After finishing that off, you'll get one final side quest in the form of a series of mazes underneath the castle to explore. I assume these are a preview of what might be in store in the sequel, and they're a lot of fun to work through.

Aside from that, the only other side content comes in the form of secrets. Since *Minimae* is, at its core, a game about walking around a big map, you spend a lot of time simply navigating long routes from here to there. If you step on just the right spots along the way, you'll find secret stashes of money. There are 48 in total, and each one you find bumps up the cash reward. They're fun to look for in and of themselves, but the gold you earn from finding them also heavily reduces any potential grinding. It's a clever

addition on the part of the developers, adding content in a very efficient yet meaningful way. Your status screen will show how many of these secrets you've found, along with other stats like how many miles you've walked. It's just a little extra fun. For those looking for a lot more extra fun, there's actually an entire second quest available in the game. It's not more difficult, but it does completely switch around the locations of everything, effectively doubling the size of the game.

P1XL have done a great job of keeping this app updated over the years. Early on, it was updated to allow you to play in portrait mode as well as landscape, a great addition since the game feels very natural to play one-handed. That same update added the second quest and a few other tweaks. Subsequent updates added the post-game content and support for 4-inch screens and just about every iOS controller you could think of. The most recent update was in June of 2014, adding MFi controller support and optimizing performance to reduce battery drain. Although I'm sure the developer is busy with other projects, I can't imagine them ever truly leaving *Minimae* behind. Perhaps we can look forward to support for the latest screen sizes at some point.

That's just about all I have to say about *Minimae*, but I'm not quite done yet. There's also the matter of *Freemiae*. In 2014, P1XL Games decided to try out some free-to-play games to see if they would fare better in the current market conditions. After one of the more interesting takes on the *Flappy Bird* phenomenon in *Bad Student Driver* ([Free](#)), they set out to make free-to-play versions of their other titles. The first of these was *RPG Quest – Freemiae*, and it was quite a thing. I would guess that the overall goal was to make an ad-supported version of *Minimae*, but P1XL may have tipped their hand on their true feelings about free-to-play a little too much. Whether it was deliberate or not, they made a game that, through its gameplay, serves as biting commentary on the shift in the market.

Initially, *Freemiae* seems to be just what it says on the tin: a free version of

Minimae where you can watch ads in exchange for gold, viewing the map, or a health refill. You might notice at the start that certain costs have been changed around, and there's now an NPC in each town who sells keys to the caves that contain the rings. If you don't have the key, you can't gain access to the cave. Your hero also looks a little bit different, as he's wearing a full helm that covers his face. If you talk to some of the NPCs in the towns multiple times, they'll occasionally toss out opinions on value and costs. The dialogue is a bit preachy and certainly out of place in the setting, but imagined as a twisted mirror universe version of *Minimae*, it has some merit. That's just the warm-up, however.

At first, *Freemiae* is very playable, particularly if you watch the occasional ad or two, but the farther you go in, the higher the prices get. Map orbs increase in cost with every single purchase, and weapon upgrades and keys reach astronomical prices that even the ads can't keep pace with. *Freemiae* lets you know exactly what the developers think of the idea of pouring in tons of your time to save a little money, and they're not happy thoughts. The game seems designed to make the player hit on that realization on their own. It's an interesting experiment, even if it's not all that fun. Sadly, *Freemiae* was pulled from the App Store late last year when P1XL determined it was undercutting sales of *Minimae* without earning enough money in ad revenues to make up for it, so you'll just have to take my word for it.

RPG Quest - Freemiae by P1XL Games (official trailer)

Minimae is unquestionably a very simplified RPG experience. At the same time, it makes for a nice palate cleanser between bigger adventures, and within the confines of its own rules, there's actually quite a bit of content packed into the mobile version of the game. Sniffing out the last ring or trying to uncover the final few secrets can feel like you're digging for a needle in a haystack full of random encounters, but I think it's cool how it strips away almost everything to get to the core of the exploration side of RPGs. Comb the world, find clues, stick your nose in places that look odd, and save the day by finding all the treasures and loot. For a retro throwback, it actually doesn't feel very retro at all in its gameplay, but it also doesn't feel modern. It's just this odd little minimal game, and who couldn't use more oddities in their life?

Of course, that's just my opinion on *Minimae*. What do you think of the game? I want to know, so please comment below, stop by the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#) to share your thoughts. As

for me, I'll be back next week with a highly-requested and much beloved classic that, coincidentally enough, will also be the main topic of our first **RPG Reload** podcast. Be there or be square, friends! As always, thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *I got a good feeling!*